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Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "UM students study in China, discover 'different world'" (1973). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 26053.
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UM STUDENTS STUDY IN CHINA, DISCOVER 'DIFFERENT WORLD'

By Judy Hensel
UM Information Services

MISSOULA--

Until recently, it would have been almost impossible for a young Montanan to walk down a street in Canton, China. But Dave Snyder, a University of Montana student from Great Falls, did this summer and discovered a world quite different from what he has become accustomed to in Montana.

Snyder was a member of a group of seven UM students and one faculty member who traveled to the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan in July as part of a summer study program of the American Institute of Foreign Study.

The Institute is a national organization founded in 1964 to provide comprehensive overseas study and travel programs for students and teachers. Students who travel with the Institute must pay their own expenses and must be of college age.

In Hong Kong students could take 60 hours of classroom work for academic credit in two courses, Chinese Civilization and Modern China. The classes were taught by guest lecturers from the University of Hong Kong.

Because of recent political developments including President Nixon's visit, the People's Republic of China is gradually opening up to Americans. The group took a one-week field trip to Canton in southern China. They were not put under any restrictions and were allowed to go where ever they wished.

Louis Hayes, chairman of the UM political science department who supervised academic research on the trip, said he was impressed with how relaxed the Chinese were, including the authorities.

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In addition to Hayes and Snyder, UM students making the trip were: Dennis McCloskey, Missoula; Margaret M. Warden, Great Falls; Sara E. Vichorek, Florence; Maruta Kalnins, Bethesda, Md.; Suzanne L. Chamberlain, Visalia, Calif.; and John McEwen, Grand Forks, N.D.

Snyder said he went to China "to observe people," and because he thought the trip might give him a different perspective. He said that because he has lived in Montana all his life, he needed his "horizons broadened."

He found that he and the other Americans were an oddity since they were not wearing the traditional Chinese loose-fitting clothes and their hair styles, in most cases, were longer. He also found that Americans were not expected to know the language. He said he surprised three young women who were walking down a Canton street when he greeted them with "Ni hao ma?" or "hello."

"The entire time I was there I felt I was in a different world," he said. He discovered that "things are planned in China and little is left to guess work. The people like to know where they stand."

In Canton, the students were taken on several tours which included watching a local gymnastics troupe perform. Snyder said he was "amazed" at the performance. "I have never seen such a display of physical prowess," he said.

They visited a commune and a teachers college where students are paid to go to school and exchanged thoughts about teaching methods.

Also, while in Canton, the students were about to board a bus when several members of a team of basketball players from a sewing machine factory nearby challenged them to a game. The game was organized immediately and a crowd of about 1,000 of the factory workers were let off work to watch their team soundly defeat the Americans.

Canton has the appearance of being a "bland place with a deadening sameness to it," Hayes said, with no exciting cultural dress or religious ceremonies. But, he said, he did not get the feeling that the Chinese are not content.

"China is an extremely vibrant, living place," he said, "and society kind of hums." He said the people were friendly and outgoing, and although few people are seen during the day, at night they come out into the streets to talk and socialize.

The cost for the trip for each student was \$1,300. Hayes said he feels the students "got their money's worth" from the trip. Opportunities at the University for students to obtain academic credit in foreign countries have been "sadly neglected," he said.

"Students, by and large, do not have many opportunities to partake in true learning experiences," he said. He added that not much has been done to assist students in studying in foreign countries other than in those in Europe.

While in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Hayes looked into the possibility of establishing a student exchange program between universities in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the University of Montana. He said he hopes some sort of an exchange program can be implemented in the future.

Hayes has presented a slide program and discussion in Hamilton and Polson based on the visit to South China, and presentations are planned for other communities throughout the state.

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